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## SHARON YOUNG

HSUS MARINE ISSUES FIELD DIRECTOR // BY EMILY SMITH

**LIFE ON THE WATER:** Northwest Ohio is the farthest from the ocean Sharon Young has ever lived. The wide-open fields were lovely, but she'll stick with her home in Cape Cod, thank you very much.

"I'm a coast person," says Young, who works to protect porpoises, whales, and other marine life in the United States. "Oceans are just something I need."

Young grew up in New Hampshire, studying bugs and identifying trees in the woods with her grandfather, a naturalist. Later she joined the field, too, teaching forest and coastal ecology to schoolchildren in Massachusetts, earning a wildlife rehabilitation license, and working as a naturalist on a whale-watching boat. She didn't know a lot about whales, but in the early 1980s, neither did anybody else.

"I was fascinated by the mystery," says Young, who has co-authored numerous publications on whale behavior. "It's like astronomy in that you can never get close to your subject. I'm still captivated."

In 1992, Young spoke to a group in Washington, D.C., for the now-defunct International Wildlife Coalition about the inadequacy of proposed changes to the Marine Mammal Protection Act. An HSUS wildlife scientist was in the audience and invited her to come on board. "Now I'm using science and facts to protect and advocate for the animals I love," says Young, who has since helped toughen several MMPA regulations on The HSUS's behalf. "How amazing is that?"

**FINDING SOLUTIONS:** Young isn't shy about sharing her opinions, but she knows a bully attitude has no place on the task forces on which she serves. Respect and a kind ear go much further toward fixing a problem.

She's working now with fishermen and regulators in North Carolina to reduce the number of bottlenose dolphins who die in commercial gill nets. "I like people; I like to listen to them. If you can get to know the real person, not just that he's a fisherman, the more likely you'll be able to fuse your two perspectives into a plan."

**HER FINEST WORK:** In December, the Obama administration put in place a permanent regulation to protect endangered right whales by restricting speeds in shipping lanes. Young fought hard for that—working on the issue for nearly a decade—as well as for several provisions in the reauthorized Marine Mammal Protection Act that have resulted in reduced mortalities.

But when it comes to highlights, and personal achievements, it's clear no list would be complete without her daughter, Kaia Wiley, who at 3 months old went whale-watching safely strapped to mom in a baby carrier. Now 24, Wiley works as an occupational therapist in California, helping patients recover from traumatic brain injuries. "She's a shining human being," says Young, who chose her daughter's traditional Scandinavian name to reflect her familial roots and her love of the water: "Kai" is the Hawaiian word for ocean.



REGINA ASMUTIS-SILVA